



Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5953rd meeting

Sunday, 10 August 2008, 11.35 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Grauls	(Belgium)
<i>Members:</i>	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in Georgia

Letter dated 9 August 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/537)

Letter dated 10 August 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/538)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Georgia

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Letter dated 10 August 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/538)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Georgia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Alasania (Georgia) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Edmund Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is

meeting in response to a letter dated 9 August 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia and a letter dated 10 August 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, contained in documents S/2008/537 and S/2008/538 respectively.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and by Mr. Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: I would like to begin by reading out the statement by the Secretary-General that was released fairly late last night; some members of the Council may not have received it at this point. The statement reads as follows:

"The Secretary-General is alarmed by the escalation of hostilities in Georgia which have resulted in large numbers of casualties and massive destruction in South Ossetia and other regions of Georgia. The Secretary-General is particularly concerned about violence spreading to areas outside the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

"The Secretary-General is profoundly concerned over mounting tensions in the Abkhaz zone of conflict, including the bombing of the Upper Kodori Valley and the ongoing military build-up along the security zone. In the context of the announcement by the Abkhaz de facto authorities of a military operation in the Upper Kodori Valley which could be dangerously destabilizing, he calls for the exercise of maximum restraint by all concerned as well as the guarantee of the safety and security of the unarmed United Nations military observers.

"The Secretary-General urges all parties to immediately end hostilities and to engage, without delay, in negotiations to achieve a peaceful settlement. In this regard, the Secretary-General welcomes international efforts to assist the parties in resolving the situation. The Secretary-General believes that for the success of this endeavour, all armed contingents which are not authorized by respective agreements on South Ossetia should leave the zone of conflict. The Secretary-General urges all parties to respect the principle of the territorial integrity of States

enshrined in the Charter and to refrain from actions that could undermine efforts to settle the longstanding conflicts in Georgia. The Secretary-General also calls for immediate steps to be undertaken in order to address the humanitarian crisis.

"The Secretary-General strongly believes that a lasting solution can only be found by peaceful means."

Today, what I shall do is give a short briefing on the general issues that builds on the briefing that Assistant Secretary-General Mulet gave yesterday in the Security Council's consultations, and then Mr. Mulet will brief on the Abkhazia issue. That will be our division of labour.

As Mr. Mulet noted yesterday, the United Nations has no first-hand information from the area of the conflict in South Ossetia and largely relies on media reports. Since most of the Georgian Internet sites are blocked, the information therefore comes mostly from Russian media and other international sources.

Over the past few days, there has been a sharp escalation of hostilities in Georgia, which has spread to areas beyond the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

The exact situation in Tskhinvali and other areas in South Ossetia remains difficult to ascertain due to a lack of United Nations or other international presence on the ground. In the afternoon, Georgian officials repeated an earlier announcement that Georgian troops have withdrawn from most of South Ossetia, including Tskhinvali. The Georgian side denied defeat and said it had to address a humanitarian catastrophe. According to news reports, the withdrawal was disputed by Russian military sources, who said that there are still Georgian military units and that sporadic fighting continues. Russian military sources have also said that there have been no contacts with Georgian military officials.

The media report ongoing clashes south of Tskhinvali. The Georgian authorities claimed that the Russian troops were moving towards Gori in Georgia proper, and Georgian troops started taking defensive position around the city. Interlocutors from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) informed United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) that approximately 2,000 ethnic Georgian internally displaced persons

(IDPs) from South Ossetia have arrived in collective centres near Tbilisi and Gori, and many others are staying with relatives. The UNHCR expects up to 20,000 IDPs in the final analysis. The UNHCR believes that 5,000 have crossed into North Ossetia-Alania.

Today, early in the morning, Russian aircraft resumed attacks on strategic and military targets outside the zone of conflict, including a military airport, which includes a military aircraft repair factory, and a tank repair factory near Tbilisi, the port of Poti and targets near Gori. The bombing of the military airport situated 70 kilometres from Tbilisi has been confirmed by UNOMIG. Russian military officials confirmed the loss of two aircraft over Gori.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator has recommended international staff to evacuate. At this moment, however, no international staff members have as yet left Georgia.

And in the past hour the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi had been given a note verbale containing the information that that Georgian forces are participating in a ceasefire in South Ossetia; it also states that all Georgian forces have left the zone of conflict, that they have created a humanitarian corridor to allow the evacuation of civilians and that they are ready for immediate talks with the Russian Federation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

Mr. Mulet: I will brief the Council on events related to the mandate and area of responsibility of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). I would like to recall some information about the Mission itself. We have 136 military observers; we have 18 United Nations police personnel on the ground, and 311 civilians, in different sites. The key mandated tasks for this Mission are to monitor and verify the implementation by the parties of the 1994 ceasefire agreement, to contribute to the creation of conditions conducive to return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and to promote a political settlement of the conflict.

The situation in Abkhazia remains of extreme concern, with a military build-up continuing on the Abkhaz side of the zone of conflict, as well as bombings of the Upper Kodori Valley. Over the past two days, the Abkhaz side has moved troops and heavy weapons into the zone of conflict. Such movement was initially prevented by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force, but their commander, General Chaban, yesterday informed UNOMIG that they could no longer stop the Abkhaz from moving weapons and personnel into the zone. UNOMIG has confirmed that the CIS peacekeepers did not attempt to stop such deployments. Abkhaz troops and heavy weapons are now present all along the ceasefire line.

Yesterday morning, the Abkhaz de facto deputy defence minister requested that UNOMIG withdraw its observers from the Upper Kodori Valley, as their safety could no longer be guaranteed. UNOMIG then withdrew all 15 observers that had been present in the Upper Kodori Valley. Following the request for UNOMIG to leave the Upper Kodori Valley, the Abkhaz de facto authorities announced a decision, taken by de facto president Bagapsh, to push the Georgian armed forces out of the Upper Kodori Valley. Beginning yesterday afternoon, UNOMIG has reported ongoing aerial bombardments of Georgian villages in the Upper Kodori Valley. The Mission also observed the movement by the Abkhaz side of substantial numbers of heavy weapons and military personnel towards the Kodori Valley.

Earlier today, Abkhaz de facto president Bagapsh gave a press conference, where he announced that their operation in the Upper Kodori Valley was proceeding according to plan. He stated that Georgian civilians and armed personnel had both been given an ultimatum to leave the Upper Kodori Valley. Bagapsh also stated that his side was coordinating their activities with the CIS peacekeeping forces in order to restore order in the peacekeepers' area of responsibility. He said that Sukhumi had requested Russia to take measures to strengthen the Abkhaz maritime border. Negotiations with Georgia, he said, were only possible after the current Abkhaz operations were completed.

UNOMIG has received information from multiple sources that most of the civilian population of the Upper Kodori Valley has left. Throughout last night and today, UNOMIG has obtained information on an ongoing build-up of forces, both Abkhaz and Russian,

in and near the zone of conflict. UNOMIG observed a Russian airborne battalion move towards the zone of conflict this morning. UNOMIG also reports that a number of Ilyushin-76 transport aeroplanes have landed at Sukhumi airport, beginning yesterday evening. It also appears that a number of Russian ships belonging to the Black Sea fleet have moved close to the coast of Abkhazia. Abkhaz forces and heavy weapons have been moved to the administrative border with Georgia across the entire zone of conflict. Bombings have taken place in the vicinity of the Georgian city of Zugdidi, causing panic among the local population, many of whom are trying to seek protection at the UNOMIG regional headquarters located there.

As a result of the increasing tension and the bombings in the Mission's area of operations, UNOMIG has had to scale down its operations and is now conducting only essential patrols. The Mission continues to liaise with the sides and with the CIS peacekeepers. For the time being, UNOMIG has not observed major movements of troops or weapons into the zone of conflict on the Georgian side. So far, the only actions observed have been reinforcements for existing positions along the ceasefire line.

Overall, with the exception of the bombing of the Upper Kodori Valley and of targets near Zugdidi, including the Senaki military base, no direct confrontations appear to have broken out as yet in our area of operations. UNOMIG has requested that the CIS peacekeepers provide security for its regional headquarters in Gali and Zugdidi.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mulet for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Alasania (Georgia): For the past 12 hours, the inhuman and indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Georgian territory has continued. The scale of the devastating destruction and loss of innocent life has yet to be assessed. An armed invasion by Russian ground troops has already been transformed into a full-scale occupation of parts of Georgian territory. The process of exterminating the Georgian population and annihilating Georgian statehood is in full swing: a 6,000-strong Russian occupying force with 100 tanks, 115 armoured military vehicles and 300 mortars has entered the Tskhinvali region from the Russian

Federation. A Russian regular military unit comprising 4,000 servicemen has been deployed in Ochamchir, a city close to the Upper Kodori that is under the control of the Abkhaz separatist regime. Villages in my country, most of them located well outside either zone of conflict, have been attacked several times. Three bombs have been dropped on the aviation plant in Tbilisi; as a result, it has been totally destroyed. The airfield located in western Georgia, at Kopitnari, has also been attacked. Russian jets have attacked Zugdidi. In addition, Gachiani, in the Gardabani district, 20 kilometres south-west of the capital and also outside the conflict zone, has been bombed; it is close to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

The Russian air force continues to bomb Gori, located 60 kilometres north-west of Tbilisi. The city of Oni, in the western part of the country, has been bombed several times. The port of Poti, located on the coast of the Black Sea 360 kilometres west of Tbilisi — which is, of course, outside the conflict zone — has been heavily bombed. The Russian navy has prevented a humanitarian cargo ship carrying wheat from entering the Poti port; the ship was forced to go back. Other Russian battleships have been deployed in order to enforce the blockade against Georgia.

One of the pilots detained has testified that pilots in general have been instructed to carry out an unlimited number of overflights and indiscriminate bombardment, which clearly reflect elements of war crimes. Russia is forcing Abkhaz separatists into the conflict, compelling them to open up another warfront, as described by the Secretariat. Attacks on Uta confirm that they are seriously preparing for an assault on Kodori. Russian planes have bombed the villages of Avadhara and Bilisi, in Upper Abkhazia. There are signs that the attacks will continue, and, as noted by the Secretariat, the claims made by the de facto Abkhaz authorities have been translated into reality. The Russian air force has bombarded Chkhaltá, the administrative centre of Abkhazia. Four thousand Russian troops from Sebastopol have landed at the port of Ochamchira, on the Black Sea.

All of this means that Russia is continuing its full-scale offensive. As a result of deliberate inaction on the part of the Russian peacekeeping forces, a military unit has passed through the conflict zone, as has already been stated here. That fact was confirmed today by the Secretariat. The population of the Upper

Kodori Valley is facing an imminent threat. We strongly urge all members of the Security Council to advise the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) to find a way to resume its monitoring of Upper Abkhazia, because that is the only way to save the civilian population there.

As stated numerous times yesterday by the Russian leadership and in diplomatic circles, it appears that Russia has its own justification for an all-out invasion. First, we have heard repeatedly that the Georgian side violated agreements. From the same point of departure, the Russian assertion is that they are engaging in peacemaking, or so-called peace enforcement. That is truly in the category of absurdity and nonsense. The actions of the Russian side have no foundation, either in existing agreements or in international law. The question is being asked whether Russia is trying to replace the Security Council, when in reality it is an aggressor in this conflict.

As has been stated here, the Georgian leadership reached out overnight to the Russian political leadership. Unfortunately, the President of the Russian Federation refused to directly engage with his Georgian counterpart in dialogue. In order to visibly demonstrate the seriousness of our ceasefire offer, the Georgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Tbilisi, as indicated here, conveyed a note verbale to the envoy of the Russian Federation indicating that the President of Georgia had issued a declaration to cease all military activities in South Ossetia. All Georgian troops have been withdrawn from the conflict zone, and the Georgian side has opened a humanitarian corridor south of Tskhinvali to allow the peaceful population and the wounded peaceful population to leave the conflict zone. During the ceasefire, Georgian forces have been bombed many times and prevented from making a full withdrawal.

Georgia calls upon this institution, the highest legitimate international authority in the world, for an immediate diplomatic and humanitarian intervention to protect Georgia from the ongoing Russian aggression and occupation. We should all act immediately to prevent further loss of human life.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): The United States has asked for this emergency meeting in

view of dramatic and dangerous developments over the past 24 hours in and around Georgia.

First, there has been an intensification of Russian military activity in the South Ossetian region. This includes an influx of many thousands of troops beyond the several hundred Russian peacekeepers present when this crisis began. Military operations against Georgian forces in the conflict zone have escalated dramatically.

Secondly, the conflict has expanded. A Russian-backed military offensive has been launched in the Abkhazia region of Georgia. This was preceded by a demand from the Abkhaz for the peacekeeping presence of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) to be withdrawn from the Kodori Valley, which has since been bombed. This is a direct challenge to the mission mandated by the Security Council. Let there be no confusion about the significance of this point. Some Abkhaz officials have stated their intention to drive Georgia militarily out of the Upper Kodori Valley. Moreover, Russia has been attacking villages and cities elsewhere in Georgia, including threatening the Zugdidi region and launching air attacks against Tbilisi airport. Russian military attacks have also destroyed critical Georgian infrastructure, including seaports, airports and other facilities.

Thirdly, the result of this escalation against a sovereign State that has not posed a direct threat to Russia has increased the number of casualties and the humanitarian suffering of the people of Georgia, including in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Fourthly, against this backdrop of heightened violence, the Russian forces are actually impeding the withdrawal of Georgian forces from South Ossetia. This is an unconscionable effort to continue the conflict and prevent the Georgians from taking concrete steps to de-escalate the situation.

Fifthly, we continue to face the intransigent rejection by Russia of efforts to stop the violence. Georgia has offered a ceasefire and a restoration of the status quo of 6 August, but Russia rejects this reasonable position.

Finally, Russia continues to resist efforts by the international community to mediate this conflict, which is now clearly and unquestionably one between Russia and Georgia.

In view of this deteriorating situation, we need to ask ourselves what the Council can do to stop the violence, to stop the aggression and to return to the status quo of 6 August.

First, we have to draw the appropriate conclusions about what this conflict is and what it is not. Russia has claimed that these military operations were intended to protect its peacekeepers and the civilian population in South Ossetia. Yet its reaction goes far beyond any reasonable measure required to do so. Indeed, its escalation of the conflict has been the immediate cause of increased loss of innocent life and humanitarian suffering. Since Russia is impeding Georgian forces from withdrawing, rejecting a ceasefire and continuing to carry out military attacks against civilian centres, its claims of a humanitarian purpose are clearly not credible. Similarly, its expansion of the conflict to another separatist area in Georgia and attacks on the areas around Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, suggest other motives and objectives.

Secondly, we must condemn Russia's military assault on the sovereign State of Georgia and the violation of that country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the targeting of civilians and the campaign of terror against the Georgian population. Similarly, we need to condemn the destruction of Georgian infrastructure.

Thirdly, the Council must do what it can to ensure adherence to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and take actions to address this threat to international peace and security. That means respect for Article 2, paragraph 4, which calls for all States Members of the United Nations to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.

Therefore, we believe that the Council needs to take urgent action calling for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all forces to the status quo of 6 August. This applies particularly to Russian combat forces that have been brought in over the past week. We cannot remain indifferent to this point. We have begun consulting with others in the Security Council and expect that a draft resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire will be introduced shortly.

Fourthly, I urge the Russian Federation to carefully consider the implications of this aggression against the sovereign and democratic State of Georgia. Russia's relations with the United States and others in

the international community will be affected by its continued assault on Georgia and its refusal to contribute to a peaceful solution of this crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to express my thanks for the briefings given by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet. Unfortunately, I have to point out that the content of the briefing by Mr. Pascoe shows that the Secretariat and its leadership have not been able to adopt an objective position showing a thorough grasp of the substance of this conflict, as should be expected from the leadership of such an authoritative international organization.

Over the past several days, we have held three open meetings of the Security Council because of the situation that arose due to the aggression by Georgia against South Ossetia. I would like to recall the fact that this series of meetings began with a meeting held at the initiative of the Russian Federation. We not only proposed that meeting, but we insisted that it be an open meeting, because we had something to say about what is taking place. Today's meeting, as the President has said, is taking place on the joint initiative of Georgia and the United States of America, which is in no way surprising. We all know how close the relations established between the leaders of those two States in recent years are.

In one of our previous meetings, the Permanent Representative of Georgia named seven of supposedly Russian citizens who are allegedly working in various capacities in South Ossetia and presented that as some sort of proof that Russia was governing the whole of South Ossetia. According to my information at least 127 advisers from the United States Department of Defense alone are working in Georgia at the present time. I cannot give their names, but I am sure the Permanent Representative of Georgia knows the names of those advisers, to say nothing of other types of advisers.

On 7 August — precisely the day on which Georgia subsequently launched its military attack against South Ossetia — a large-scale joint American-Georgian military exercise concluded involving some 1,000 American troops. Tellingly, the name of this joint

exercise was "Immediate response". So our United States colleagues and our Georgian colleagues have been immediately putting to use the training that they had received.

What is taking place now is far from unexpected. As members will recall, on many occasions the Russian Federation drew attention to the dangerous situation that was evolving around Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On many occasions the Russian Federation drew attention to the fact that Georgia was building up its weapons, including offensive weapons, at an increasing rate. Georgia is the world record holder in the increase of its military budget, which over recent years has grown thirtyfold. Now we understand what the purpose of all that was.

I shall now return to the events that we are discussing today. Let me recall that everything began on the night of 7 August, but I shall return to that theme later. When I speak of the close cooperation between the United States and Georgia, we should not like to believe or to think that the United States gave the green light to the rash military action by the Georgian leadership. We are in close contact with the United States, and — I shall come back to this later — despite what Ambassador Khalilzad said with regard to our cooperation and our cooperation with other partners in the international community, that cooperation will, of course, continue, so as to return peace to Georgia.

Allow me to return to the events that we are currently discussing. The Georgian aggression against South Ossetia began on the night of 7 to 8 August. When it began, our military forces contacted the military leadership in Georgia. The Georgian representative stated that they were beginning a war against South Ossetia, and the commander of the Georgia peacekeeping contingent, Mr. Khurashvili, publicly explained that Georgia was undertaking a so-called restoration of constitutional order in South Ossetia. So, they were resolving a conflict that had lasted longer than 15 years by military means. Georgian military forces started firing against South Ossetia with artillery including Grad multiple rocket launchers. These systems were used in a barbaric way, since, as everybody knows, they do not have accurate targeting systems; they are used to fire at large areas. Therefore, there was a large loss of civilian life.

At the same time, the military action by Georgia began when they started to attack our peacekeepers and to seize the towns where our peacekeepers live. They attacked with tanks, aircraft and heavy artillery. As members know, there have been deaths and casualties among our peacekeepers: 12 of our peacekeepers died on the first day.

So how can we describe this action by the Georgian leadership? It has been said that aggression is only when one party attacks another. But if the aggression is carried out against your own people, is that in any way better? What legal terms can be used to describe what has been done by the Georgian leadership? Can we use "ethnic cleansing", for example, when, over a number of days, nearly 30,000 of the 120,000 people of South Ossetia have become refugees who have fled to Russia: more than a quarter of the population. They went across the border from South Ossetia to the North at great risk to their lives. Is that ethnic cleansing or is it not? Should we describe that as genocide or not? When out of that population of 120,000, 2,000 innocent civilians die on the first day, is that genocide or is it not? How many people, how many civilians must die before we describe it as genocide?

Today, as President Saakashvili did yesterday on television, the Permanent Representative of Georgia spoke sorrowfully about the death of innocent civilians in Georgia, and of course the death of any civilian is naturally a cause of great concern and regret. But why were they not saddened when Tskhinvali was wiped from the face of the Earth, along with 10 villages on the border between South Ossetia and Georgia? How should we react to all of that? How should we in the international community react when, despite all the international agreements that exist — and let me recall that our peacekeepers are in South Ossetia in accordance with the Dagomys agreement of 1992, which was signed by Georgia and South Ossetia — they are attacking directly and are trying to annihilate civilians, most of whom are Russian citizens? What did they expect? Did they expect our peacekeepers to run away, as some peacekeepers ran away from Srebrenica? We could not allow that to happen. We could not leave the civilian population in South Ossetia in dire straits or leave our peacekeepers without protection. So, additional troops were sent to Georgia, and they are still engaged in the task of removing Georgia from South Ossetia.

Let me say that we are not occupying territory that does not belong to South Ossetia. There has been talk today of the area of action and of the appropriateness and reasonableness of our action. Well, our action was appropriate for 16 years according to the Dagomys agreement. We operated perfectly well as peacekeepers when the Georgian side was behaving properly. Now, tell me, was the Georgian side acting properly when it committed this act of aggression? Let us all behave properly, and then we can start talking about what constitutes proper behaviour. Any military person knows — and not only military people, I think — that when such an operation is conducted, places are targeted not only within the immediate zone of conflict, but sometimes also beyond that area: those areas that support military action are targeted.

We have seen that on many occasions in many situations. If we look at Kosovo, nobody there limited themselves by any definitions of what Kosovo was. They simply started to bomb Belgrade and bridges over the Danube that were many miles from the area of conflict. I categorically reject the suggestion that we are conducting military operations in an indiscriminate way. Mr. Alasania ventured to make a reference by way of argument to a "statement" that allegedly was made by a Russian prisoner of war when being interrogated in Georgia, that he had allegedly been instructed to tell our pilot to fire indiscriminately. Such comments are absolutely outrageous and unacceptable at an open meeting of the Security Council.

The statement made by Ambassador Khalilzad with regard to terror against the civilian population is absolutely unacceptable, particularly from the lips of the Permanent Representative of a country whose actions we are aware of, including with regard to civilian populations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Serbia. So if indeed we would like to find a military solution to this conflict, then let us try to find serious political solutions, and not indulge in propaganda, even if perhaps some politicians would like that. Whatever your policy might be, please do not undertake to engage in propaganda activities in the Security Council.

I would like to turn specifically to two issues. With respect to the Kodori Valley, the simplest thing would be to invite the Abkhaz representatives. On many occasions, we have said that the representatives of Abkhazia should come here and explain their position. Now they are making public statements, and,

of course, they could have clearly explained the situation here. Now, in Abkhazia, how do you think the Abkhaz feel when South Ossetia is being wiped off the face of the Earth, in a similar conflict on Georgian territory? Did we not draw attention to the unacceptable situation in the southern part of the Kodori Valley. That was in contradiction to the Moscow agreements of 1994, and many resolutions of the Security Council. So why are people so surprised now?

With regard to the activities of the Black Sea fleet, I can inform the Council that indeed ships of the Black Sea fleet of the Russian Federation have started to patrol the sea along the coast of Abkhazia near the zone of the armed conflict in South Ossetia. A note has been sent to the Georgian authorities in that regard. The aim of that operation is to ensure that we protect Russian citizens who are in that region, to provide support to the Russian peacekeeping contingent if there should be a military attack against them, and also to provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian population who are in the zone of conflict.

With the aim of preventing armed incidents in the area patrolled by Russian vessels, we have established a security zone. These actions do not seek to establish a maritime blockade of Georgia. Force will be used only in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter, in exercise of the right to self-defence by the Russian Federation.

Now, what about the way forward? What decisions should be taken? What can the international community do? First of all, we heard the strange statement that the Russian Federation was rejecting all international efforts. Of course, it is not: the fact is that President Medvedev had good talks with President Bush yesterday or the day before; our Minister for Foreign Affairs is in constant telephone contact with the Secretary of State of the United States — I think they have had five or six conversations over the past 36 hours, the most recent of them, within the past few hours, of 45 minutes in duration. We are talking to everyone, and we are explaining everything to everyone. We are listening to everyone, including representatives of the European States and the representatives of many European institutions. So, the international community can indeed play an appropriate role here.

With respect to the Permanent Representative of Georgia's outrage that our President had refused to speak with the President of Georgia. Excuse me, but what decent person would talk to him now? For years we have been explaining to him that any attempt to resolve the conflict by military means would be suicide for Georgia and that we would not permit South Ossetia and Abkhazia to be wiped off the face of the Earth or its people chased out of the Republic of Georgia. That has been clear from the first contact between President Saakashvili and the Russian President right to this very moment. He assured us — and stated publicly to the international community — that that was far from his intention and that he had no intention whatsoever to use force against his own people.

But this, of course, does not mean that we are evading any contacts with our Georgian colleagues. Such contacts are continuing at a wide variety of levels. For example, the most recent was just a few hours ago: a lengthy telephone conversation between our Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia. What, then, is the problem here? Once again, we in the Security Council are facing this issue.

For some reason, the clearest statement about a ceasefire and peace-loving intentions was made not by the Permanent Representative of Georgia but by the Permanent Representative of the United States. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia is speaking to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia. Our Minister for Foreign Affairs has stated very clearly all that I said yesterday both to my Security Council colleagues and publicly: Georgia — the Georgian military — must withdraw from South Ossetian territory, and Georgia must state its readiness to sign an agreement on the non-use of force in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Then comes the complicated process of discussing all the other issues, including, at the appropriate time, the attainment of a political solution. That will be made much more difficult, of course, following Georgia's adventurist actions.

What do they say in response? They say, "We have already left". But we know that they have not left South Ossetia: after all, they are still firing on our soldiers. If they want to leave, I can assure the Council that we will not prevent Georgian military forces from withdrawing. I assure the Council that neither the South Ossetians nor we have any use for the Georgian

military on the territory of South Ossetia. So, please do not tell us that the Under-Secretary-General or anyone else said this, that or the other thing.

We have heard many comments from the Georgian side, including very militaristic statements and including a declaration of martial law and an announcement of a general mobilization in Georgia. Yes, we have heard all of that.

Let us state clearly that we are ready to put an end to the war, that we are still withdrawing from South Ossetia, and that we will sign an agreement on the non-use of force. This is a serious approach, Mr. Khalilzad, not one that circumvents the Security Council. By the way, Mr. Khalilzad said that they were discussing this with colleagues. Perhaps he could have discussions with Russian colleagues if he wants a document to be adopted by the Security Council. That would be a serious approach, rather than a propagandistic one that might be to the liking of some United States presidential candidate or someone else in the United States political establishment.

Let us deal with this truly tragic situation in a serious way. There are serious decisions that can be taken; these can be adopted immediately — right now. But they must first be adopted in Tbilisi, then by Russia and then, I hope, by the entire international community. That will help Georgia exit from the very difficult situation in which it finds itself as a result of the adventurist policies of its leadership.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish first of all to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet for their briefings, and to reaffirm our full confidence in them and our support for them and for all members of the Secretariat and the Secretariat leadership.

My delegation regrets that it is obliged to note once again that the situation in Georgia has deteriorated. We are particularly alarmed by the expansion of the conflict, both in intensity and in geographical scope, including with continued air strikes against targets outside the area of South Ossetia, the presence of significant maritime forces along the coast and the threat to the region of Abkhazia.

According to the information we have received, there have also been aerial attacks on the Kodori Valley, a build-up of Abkhaz troops and military

equipment in the area of the line of demarcation between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, and a threat of major military operations by the Abkhaz side. We are also gravely concerned at the consequences of this deteriorating situation: an increasing number of victims, refugees and displaced persons. In that regard, the figures cited by Mr. Pascoe are particularly alarming. We are also gravely concerned at the possible implications of this deteriorating situation for the peace and stability of the region.

Everything possible must be done to put an end to this conflict. The priority is an immediate cessation of hostilities. We have taken note of Georgia's announcement of the withdrawal of its forces from Ossetia and of Georgia's cessation of hostilities; that is an important step. All parties must cease hostilities immediately, and everything possible must be done to achieve a lasting resolution of the situation.

I have already referred to the diplomatic efforts undertaken by France, both in its national capacity and as current President of the European Union. The mediation mission undertaken by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union, with the participation of the United States, has travelled to Georgia. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs is to visit Moscow and Tbilisi, and the French President has submitted a simple plan for emerging from this crisis. It is based on three elements: an immediate cessation of hostilities; full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia; and restoration of the status quo preceding the hostilities, which would mean the withdrawal of Russian and Georgian forces to their earlier positions.

We consider that those elements are the essential parameters for resolving the crisis. Once we meet the conditions for attaining those objectives, a plan for international engagement could be put in place. It will be necessary to fine-tune its modalities. There is no doubt that the Security Council will be involved in that exercise.

Before we get there, I would like to say that the Security Council bears a significant responsibility that it must shoulder: to support the ongoing diplomatic efforts and to call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, for a withdrawal of forces to their earlier positions and for respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

Others have said before me, and I too would like to emphasize, that it is important for the Security Council rapidly to speak out on the basis of those elements. France plans to work actively in the coming hours to ensure that the Security Council is indeed able to speak out in this manner. I think the time has come for us all to shoulder our responsibility and to end a deteriorating process that is likely to have serious consequences for international peace and security.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for calling this meeting today. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General for their briefings. The Secretariat, the United Nations and the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) are doing a difficult job in very difficult circumstances.

Before beginning my remarks, I would like to reject the allegation by the Russian ambassador that the Secretariat, and the Under-Secretary-General in particular, are biased. We have a convention in this Council that we rely on the information given to us by the Secretariat. An attack on the Secretariat is an attack on the institutions of the United Nations. And Russia, which is fast becoming a party to the conflict, is ill-placed to make such a claim, and it does it no credit.

As others have said, we are witnessing a grave escalation of the situation in Georgia. Further fighting has happened over night, and there has been further Russian bombing of Georgian territory. Russian naval vessels have moved closer, and there are media reports that they are tasked with preventing supplies to Georgia; there are concerns that supplies may not get through to other countries in the Caucasus.

Overnight, Russian bombing included an attack on the military airfield near the civilian airport outside Tbilisi. In a meeting on 10 August with delegations from the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United States, the Georgian Foreign Minister confirmed that the Georgian side has pulled back from most of South Ossetia and that Georgia has disengaged from Russian forces. She also said that Russian forces have told Georgia to negotiate a ceasefire with the proper person. Saakashvili has tried to contact Putin, but we understand that there has been no reply for several hours, and we heard from Ambassador Churkin why that is the case. I will merely make the obvious point that if leaders are not prepared to talk to each

other, it is rather hard to see how peace efforts can move forward.

We have heard disturbing reports that there will only be a ceasefire once the Georgians have committed to a non-use-of-force agreement and have withdrawn completely from South Ossetia. Meanwhile, there are reports that other speakers have referred to of Russian forces striking Zugdidi in Georgia proper and of Abkhaz armed personnel movements.

We appreciate that it is difficult to get authoritative accounts of what is happening on the ground, as UNOMIG has been forced to pull back and Russian forces throughout Georgia have, through their actions on the ground, caused international monitors to have to leave. Our embassy is having trouble getting access to its own premises in Tbilisi because of the Russian actions, and we understand that there are foreign nationals, including British nationals, who may be trapped in parts of the conflict zone. We look to all the combatants to protect foreign nationals and other civilians. We will need corridors so that they can be safely evacuated, and we hold all the combatants responsible for the safety of our citizens.

Ambassador Churkin says there is no military solution, but we heard this morning from Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin that the situation requires — and he used the present tense — a military intervention. We also heard from Prime Minister Putin about a “fatal blow” being delivered to the territorial integrity of Georgia.

We are witnessing, it appears, a grave violation of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russian forces have certainly violated respect for the international norms of peacekeeping, and it is a gross distortion by Russia to claim peacekeeping duties as the reason for their actions. Those actions have gone beyond any reasonable, proportionate response.

Instead of cold war rhetoric, we need the Russian representative to give us answers to the following questions: Why can Russia not support a cessation of hostilities and a withdrawal of all armed personnel, including their own regular and irregular forces, to positions pertaining on 6 August? What are Russia’s political and military intentions in respect of Georgia? And what are Russia’s political and military intentions in respect of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, once the fighting has stopped?

What we have heard today from the Secretariat casts doubt on Russia's claims that their actions are humanitarian or designed to uphold peace and security in the Caucasus.

I would like also to reject the equivalence the Russian ambassador sought to establish between the situation in Georgia and that in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999. The situations are very different, but if the Russian actions are reminiscent of any party in that conflict, it is certainly not NATO that their actions remind us of.

As other speakers have said, we endorse the strong statement of the Secretary-General last night. I would like to echo what the French presidency of the European Union said: we repeat our calls here in the Chamber for an immediate and unconditional end by all parties, irregular and regular forces, to hostilities. We call on the Russian and Georgian sides and all the other parties to engage with the international mediation efforts, those led by the European Union, the OSCE and the United States, and to withdraw to positions of before 6 August. We call for all to respect the principles of the United Nations Charter. We call for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity to be respected. We also call for humanitarian needs to be addressed. But that must not be used as pretext by the Russian authorities to keep their forces on Georgian territory or to insert further troops. We need urgently to establish an international presence on the ground to assist efforts at peace, monitor the ceasefire and help protect civilians.

In respect of Abkhazia in Georgia, we express our strong support of UNOMIG and condemn hostilities in and around Abkhazia. These are in contravention of the ceasefire agreement of 1994. If it is indeed the case that Russian forces are moving on Zugdidi, then they should leave. All parties should honour their obligations under previous Security Council resolutions on Abkhazia. It is extremely concerning that there are reports of Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeepers doing nothing to stop or inhibit offensive movements by Abkhaz armed personnel. That, too, vitiates the purpose of international peacekeeping. We call on Russia to use its influence over those in Abkhazia who are intent on broadening the conflict.

Finally, we have heard from a couple of delegations here this morning that they propose to

bring forward action in the Security Council to support a cessation of hostilities. My Government will do everything it can to support those moves.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I wish first of all to reconfirm our full confidence in the impartiality and objectivity of the Secretariat and to express our thanks to Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet for their valuable briefings.

While we have clarified our position in all the previous open meetings and consultations of the Security Council, three or four times already, I would like again to add our voice to support the unconditional restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, as a first step. I would like also to call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the restoration of the situation prevailing prior to 6 August. I would thus like to call for an immediate end to all ground, air and sea operations in the area.

From that perspective, we wish to express support for the joint mediation efforts of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and for the specific ideas outlined by the French presidency of the European Union. We believe that the extension of the hostilities to Abkhazia is a further source of deep concern and that all parties must immediately comply with resolution 1808 (2008) in all its aspects.

We welcome the opening of a humanitarian area to protect civilians from the consequences of these events and to ease suffering in this very difficult situation.

Finally, we believe that the gravity of the situation requires immediate action by the Security Council.

Mr. Skračić (Croatia): Allow me to start, like other colleagues, by thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet for their briefings.

This is the third time that we have met in this Chamber in as many days on the situation in Georgia. My delegation has expressed and continues to express its grave concerns at recent developments in that country. The situation in the conflict zone in South Ossetia, Georgia, seems to be getting worse; reports indicate that heavy fighting between Georgian and Russian armed forces continues unabated. All of that

has culminated in the Georgian parliament's declaration of a state of war.

Croatia is also extremely concerned by the introduction of large numbers of Russian troops into the conflict area of South Ossetia, Georgia, and now into the Abkhazia region of Georgia. Let me be clear: Croatia fully supports and respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and sees the violation of its borders as totally unacceptable.

In that regard, and as we have stated on previous occasions in this Chamber, we understand that the Russian Federation takes seriously its obligations as a peacekeeper in Georgia's region of South Ossetia, and we welcome that fact. However, we feel strongly that its actions in the past days go far beyond the role of a peacekeeper as foreseen in the 1992 armistice agreement among Georgian, Russian and South Ossetian leaders.

Moreover, Croatia is very concerned about the escalation of the conflict and its widening to other areas of Georgia not connected with the situation in South Ossetia. We feel strongly that a country purporting to act as a peacekeeper in one region of another sovereign State should not be using its military to target military and civilian targets in another, completely unrelated region of the same sovereign State, whatever the reasoning. We are extremely concerned by the fact that efforts to de-escalate the conflict through direct diplomatic links between Georgia and Russia or between the authorities of the separatist regions in Georgia are not making any real progress.

Croatia calls once again on all sides to immediately and unconditionally agree to a ceasefire and to refrain from further acts of provocation. We believe that it would be very difficult to have a return to the situation of 6 August, before the hostilities began, and a restoration of the status quo ante during that time if a ceasefire cannot be agreed to. Both Georgia and Russia need to withdraw their forces following the establishment of a ceasefire and then to re-engage in diplomatic and political efforts to resolve outstanding issues.

We welcome the Georgian decision to withdraw its forces from South Ossetia and hope that that signals the start of talks among Georgian, South Ossetian and Russian authorities. At the same time, we are disturbed by reports that the retreating Georgian troops are being

fired upon. Russia needs to be a credible partner in this process. It should not be leveraging its position to the detriment of any of the parties within Georgia and, in particular, should not dictate the outcome of talks between Georgian and South Ossetian authorities or between Georgian and Abkhazian authorities.

We welcome the joint mission of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that went to Georgia yesterday and sincerely hope that through its efforts it will be able to broker a much-needed ceasefire and return to negotiations. We especially support the ongoing role and activities of the OSCE in the South Ossetian region of Georgia as an impartial mediator, and we believe that the offer of the use of its good offices should be taken up by all sides to the conflict.

Finally, my delegation deplores the most recent actions taken by the de facto authorities of Georgia's Abkhazia region in the Upper Kodori Valley vis-à-vis the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the shelling of Georgian villages. Those authorities should not be exacerbating an already fragile situation elsewhere in the country by pre-empting the use of force. We hope that the authorities of the Abkhaz region of Georgia will refrain from further hostile acts and will allow UNOMIG to return to that region, in line with resolutions of the Security Council and existing agreements.

One more thing: my delegation too will be ready to support action by the Council as proposed by the delegations of France and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet for their briefings. However, I take note of the fact that, as they said, given the prevailing situation it is difficult to gather information

We are concerned about the continued escalation of the hostilities in the conflict zones in the context of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, which has resulted in numerous casualties among civilians and peacekeepers as well as in massive destruction of public and private property. We call upon all parties concerned to exercise the utmost restraint, to strictly observe the agreements that they have signed and to return to negotiations with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict, on the basis of respect for and due consideration of one another's legitimate interests. We strongly urge the parties

concerned to allow and facilitate humanitarian activities to help the affected populations. Finally, we continue to support international efforts to help resolve the conflict.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Pascoe for his statement this morning and by reaffirming my delegation's absolute confidence in the excellent work that he has accomplished. I also thank Mr. Mulet and the Permanent Representative of Georgia for their statements.

Like other delegations, Costa Rica believes that the Secretary-General's statement reflects the chief concerns of members of the Security Council regarding this conflict, whose potential for regional destabilization could lead to an extremely grave situation. The Secretary-General accurately reflects the conviction of the overwhelming majority of Members of the Organization that only a peaceful and political solution, not a military one, can put an end to this conflict. Costa Rica regrets the scale that the hostilities have reached and deplors the fact that they have spread beyond the conflict zone. We are convinced of the need for moderation on all sides, including that of the Russian Federation, whose active participation in this conflict threatens to transform it into a crisis of international dimensions.

We do not believe that the repetition of mutual accusations and the use of language that is truly aggressive in any way helps to calm spirits or open up options aimed at restoring peace. The repeated use of terms such as "genocide", "ethnic cleansing" and "war crimes" should give rise to reflection. In that regard, we call for a more cautious approach with a use of language that will provide more space and further guarantees towards strengthening collective security mechanisms.

It is time to call for moderation. In that regard, we welcome the French Government's initiative and the mediation efforts undertaken by other key actors. We call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the restoration of the situation prevailing before the conflict. That is the path towards peace, and the Security Council must follow that path in compliance with its lofty responsibilities. We are here to strengthen the rule of international law, the guarantees of collective security and internationally recognized principles, including the protection of the sovereignty

and territorial integrity of States, in this case of Georgia.

We reiterate our call for moderation, a cessation of hostilities and the establishment of contacts between the parties, as that is the road towards a political solution to the conflict, something to which we are all committed as we shoulder the lofty responsibilities we bear.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): First of all, my delegation would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe and Mr. Edmond Mulet for the information they have kindly provided us on the situation in Georgia.

This is the third time that the Security Council has met in a very short period of time to try and find a diplomatic solution to this grave dispute, which shows that we are facing one of the most serious crises of recent years.

For that reason, quite frankly, Burkina Faso is very worried at the way events are going. We are particularly worried and concerned by the continuing escalation of the violence in South Ossetia, Georgia, and by the extension of the conflict to other regions of Georgia, particularly Abkhazia. We especially regret the ever increasing number of victims, particularly among the civilian population, and the continuing worsening of the humanitarian situation. Given the current state of the conflict and the likely developments, there is no doubt whatsoever that the situation has now become extremely dangerous for the entire region, and if we are not careful, it could get even worse. Now, under those conditions, it is essential that other States in the region demonstrate the greatest restraint in order to avoid the conflict taking on broader dimensions.

We urge the international community to call upon all the parties involved to cease hostilities immediately. At this stage, it is essential that they commit themselves to a ceasefire without delay, that they renounce the use of force and respect international humanitarian law and human rights, and that they agree to opening a humanitarian corridor to evacuate the wounded and refugees. We believe the best way to do that is to engage in negotiations on the basis of the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

We also call upon the parties to do everything possible not to jeopardize the presence, the mandate or the security of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia in Abkhazia. Burkina Faso supports all ongoing initiatives aimed at putting an end to the hostilities and bringing the parties to the negotiating table.

For my delegation, given the seriousness and the continued worsening of the situation, it is urgent and essential that the Security Council do everything it can to convince the parties to cease the fighting, to renounce the use of force and to resume dialogue at all costs. Of course, if all of this can be done through a consensus-based resolution of Security Council, then Burkina Faso will make its humble contribution.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Over the past few days and on several occasions here in the Council, my delegation has expressed its profound concern over the escalating violence in South Ossetia, Georgia.

Today, that concern has been greatly magnified. We do not wish to repeat what is already widely known of the serious deterioration of conditions, as reported by the Secretariat. We thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Edmond Mulet for their briefings, which were, as usual, important and informative.

However, we wish to underscore one fact that is giving rise to the deepest concern, namely, the humanitarian consequences. The lack of a collective Security Council voice on the conflict in South Ossetia, Georgia, must not extend to silence on such a humanitarian toll. Indonesia is deeply moved by the suffering being experienced by innocent civilians — women, children and the elderly — as fighting rages around them. We wish to impress upon all conflicting parties that they should carry out their obligations under international humanitarian law. That universally recognized body of law is designed precisely to protect civilians, in particular women and children, in times of armed conflict. Immediate practical steps are needed to protect those people.

We must not allow the logic of war to prevail — a vicious cycle of violence and more violence. Instead, we must assure the ascendancy of diplomacy and the power of reason and argument over the use of force. We recognize that the inherent dispute over South Ossetia, Georgia, may not be ripe for an instant solution. However, ultimately, dialogue is the only path

towards a comprehensive and lasting solution. In the midst of the grave situation in Georgia, Indonesia finds some encouragement, however tenuous, in the diplomatic efforts being made to de-escalate tensions and bring the violence to an end. We strongly support those efforts.

We wish also to emphasize the importance of communication among Council members, especially among the principals, in order to forge common ground and consensus. Once again, my delegation would like to reiterate the importance of a simple and early collective message by the Council to all the parties, unburdened by any other consideration except humanitarian ones: end the violence now.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to express my gratitude for the briefings that were given to us by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet.

Panama has listened very closely and with great concern to the views expressed in this Chamber over the past few days by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Georgia and by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation and other members of the Council.

Regarding this matter, Panama would like to state that we are concerned by and condemn the decision taken by the Georgian Government to seek to impose its authority over South Ossetia through the use of force. Panama is also concerned by and condemns the entirely disproportionate, and therefore illegitimate, use of force by the Russian Federation with the stated aim of protecting its citizens and peacekeeping forces.

Panama recalls that the right of self-defence provided for in Article 51 of the Charter has some basic restrictions, and any abuse of these by the Russian Federation is a violation of its fiduciary obligations as a permanent member of the Council.

Panama issues a call for the Council to immediately express itself in favour of a cessation of hostilities and a return to the status quo ante. The Council should also support the diplomatic efforts undertaken by a number of countries and international organizations. Panama expresses its respect for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia, and also wishes to recognize the right to self-determination of the people of South Ossetia. Panama is aware of the conflict between those two principles.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Like those who took the floor earlier, I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Assistant Secretary-General Mulet for their briefings.

My country wishes to state its deep concern at the escalation of violence and the very high number of civilian casualties, displaced persons and refugees, as well as the large-scale destruction in the capital of South Ossetia and in other areas.

Mistaken assessments or a certain short-sightedness can unfortunately lead to disasters of this nature. But when that occurs, the international community, and the Security Council in particular, must urgently shoulder their responsibilities.

We see very clearly that a serious humanitarian disaster has beset the region, and the Council must focus on putting an end to it. In spite of the suffering, the dire humanitarian situation and the deteriorating situation on the ground, the Council has shown itself to be incapable of agreeing on common language. My country would support any initiative whatsoever, any efforts whatsoever, aimed at reaching consensus within this Council. Here, we reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire, for a return to the status quo ante and for respect for existing resolutions and agreements.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Belgium.

I would like first of all to thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Pascoe, and the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Mulet, for their briefings. I would like to reiterate at the outset my country's confidence in the impartiality of the Secretariat of this Organization.

Belgium expresses its very serious concern at the disturbing evolution of events on the ground, which have been marked by an escalation of military operations and a territorial extension of the conflict to areas beyond South Ossetia, in particular towards Abkhazia. Furthermore, the events of recent days have created a very serious humanitarian situation and have led to considerable damage. Above all, they have taken the lives of a large number of victims.

Belgium would like firmly to stress three elements. First, Belgium wishes to express its unconditional support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally

recognized borders. Secondly, Belgium calls for an immediate ceasefire without any preconditions and a return to the situation that existed on the ground prior to 6 August. Thirdly, Belgium emphatically recalls how important it is for all parties concerned to emerge from a military approach and adopt a peaceful approach. Only a political process can be the basis for lasting peace in the region. We therefore support the various diplomatic initiatives that are currently under way and that are aimed at helping the parties to find a solution.

Finally, Belgium expresses its grave concern with regard to the measures that led yesterday to the forced withdrawal of military observers of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia from the Kodori Valley and recalls its full support for that United Nations operation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of Georgia has asked for the floor to make a further statement, and I call on him now.

Mr. Alasania (Georgia): First of all, let me express our gratitude towards the majority — the near-totality — of the members of the Security Council for their observations. I also want to express our appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General for their observations and their briefings.

For a moment, I thought that Mr. Churkin did not hear what the briefers were saying, but then I just found everything quite logical, because all that we were hearing here from the Russian Federation is reminiscent of the statements and propaganda by the Soviet Union when it invaded Afghanistan, Prague and Budapest. The statements were not only based on false information; they were cynical, outrageous and inhuman.

Since when can a neighbouring country use strategic bombers and 24-hour non-stop indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets be called a support of a peace operation? What are the grounds for Russia doing something like this?

My region is familiar with Russian-style peace enforcement. We have seen it twice in my neighbourhood. When the Republic of Chechnya in the north Caucasus was erased from the face of the Earth, we turned a blind eye. We cannot do that now because

that is exactly Russia's intention: to erase Georgian statehood and to exterminate the Georgian people. Unless we act together now, that is not going to be stopped. I urgently call for the Council to take action today, as was proposed by the majority of Security Council members.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement, and I call on him now.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would say that I have already responded in my statement to the overwhelming majority of comments and statements by colleagues; I do not think there is any need for me to go back to them. I would, however, like to respond to just one question that related to the intentions of the Russian Federation. I want to stress that our intentions are very simple: they are rooted in history. History shows that Russia has very close ties to the many peoples of the Caucasus — peoples whose relations with each other, for centuries, have, unfortunately, been very difficult and, often, not friendly. We now see this in the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia and between Georgia and Ossetia.

But looking at the whole interconnected history of this issue, I should like to make the observation that north of South Ossetia lies North Ossetia, which is a republic of the Russian Federation. That is something that must be borne in mind. We have a deep sense of responsibility vis-à-vis the peoples of the Caucasus, and that applies — in a very positive way — to the people of Georgia and to Georgia itself. Of course, it is very difficult at this stage to speak of normal feelings between Georgians and Russians, but such feelings existed for centuries; they were very friendly feelings. We are convinced that the time will come when those feelings and those relationships will return.

When referring to North Ossetia, however, I must also say that about a million Georgians live in the Russian Federation, many of them occupying leading roles in our country's cultural and public life; they are, of course, fully fledged citizens of the Russian Federation.

Hence, the intention of the Russian Federation in this case is to ensure that the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia not fear for their lives or for their identity. We spoke today of the beginning of the

conflict and of how it has developed since 7 August. But we must also look further back into history. We must look back to a time when, in 1991, Georgia tried to deny Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only their autonomy but also their identity, by declaring them to be Georgian. When the Abkhaz and South Ossetians protested against that, Georgia responded with a military operation, which of course failed. That certainly was a major tragedy for the peoples of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia, and it produced a large number of refugees. But the solution lies not in a new operation — not in a repetition of the tragic mistake of 1991 — as we can see now.

The solution lies in the settlement plan that was emerging, which called for the conclusion of an agreement on the non-use of force, the establishment of economic contacts and the rebuilding of the social infrastructure, followed by a move towards resolving the political relations between Georgia and South Ossetia.

I do not want to go into the details of this, but Mr. Alasania was quite wrong to mention Chechnya. Russia did not decide on Chechnya's autonomous status; we never declared that Chechens were Russians. There, fortunately, everything has been sorted out. We have a distinguished Chechen Republic within the Russian Federation, whose citizens are citizens both of the Russian Federation and of the Chechen Republic, and that republic is alive and well. We truly hope that the same situation will come about at some point with respect to the relations among Georgians, Abkhazians and South Ossetians.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement, and I call on him now.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I am taking the floor to respond to what Ambassador Churkin said in his earlier statement. We heard Ambassador Churkin's polemics, which did not respond to the call we have made for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a return to the status quo ante. He has acknowledged his Government's refusal to deal with the democratically elected President of Georgia. He has acknowledged that this situation is no longer about South Ossetia. He has attacked the United Nations Secretariat. He has made specious comparisons to other conflicts.

I want to focus, however, on one point that Ambassador Churkin made. Ambassador Churkin referred to his Minister's phone conversation with Secretary of State Rice this morning. That conversation raises serious questions about Russia's objectives in this conflict. In that conversation, Foreign Minister Lavrov told United States Secretary of State Rice that the democratically elected President of Georgia — and I quote — “must go”. I quote again: “Saakashvili must go”. This is completely unacceptable and crosses the line.

I want to ask Ambassador Churkin: is your Government's objective regime change in Georgia, the overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Georgia?

Russia must affirm that its aim is not to change the democratically elected Government of Georgia and that it accepts the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia.

Russia is threatening the territorial integrity of Georgia, and this Council must act decisively to reaffirm the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement, and I call on him now.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Ambassador Khalilzad's statement was rather polemical, and I shall not respond: I think we have had enough polemics today. I will limit myself to a question of substance.

First of all, it is untrue to say that I did not respond to the appeal for a ceasefire. I explained, in realistic terms, the formula that could lead to putting an end to the bloodshed. I explained it very clearly: the Georgian military should withdraw from South Ossetia and agree to sign an agreement on the non-use of force in South Ossetia — and, we hope, also in Abkhazia. It should be said that Georgian representatives are always half-hinting that they agree — so why do they not do it? Why do they not make a proper statement on this matter and withdraw their forces from South Ossetia. We will not prevent that.

On Ambassador Khalilzad's interesting reference to a confidential diplomatic telephone call between our Minister for Foreign Affairs and his Secretary of State,

I must say at the outset that regime change is an American expression. We do not use such expressions. But, as we know from history, sometimes there are occasions when certain leaders are elected by their peoples and come to power, either democratically or semi-democratically, and become an obstacle to enabling their own people from emerging from a given situation. In such situations, some leaders take courageous decisions with regard to their political future. Sometimes, certain matters are discussed, inter alia by diplomats. But I am encouraged by the fact that Ambassador Khalilzad has referred to this publicly; I suggest that this means that he finds it an interesting idea and that he is ready to place it before the international community for its verdict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of the United States.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I am sorry that I have to take the floor again, but I want to restate my question to Ambassador Churkin. He did not respond to that question. Is the goal of the Russian Federation to change the leadership of Georgia?

The President: The representative of Georgia has asked for the floor, and I call on him.

Mr. Alasania (Georgia): I would like to make a brief comment. As I heard Ambassador Churkin talking, the question asked and the answer that was received, for me, confirm that what the Russian Federation is seeking through this military aggression and invasion is to change the democratically elected Georgian Government. But I really want to seek more clarification, as was just requested by our colleague from the United States, from the representative of the Russian Federation.

The President: I call on the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I believe that I gave a complete response. Perhaps the ambassador was not listening when I gave my response. Perhaps he did not have his earpiece on. I believe, again, that I gave a full response to his question.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.